3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
SP17 Nambicuara SP17

[621] tuations, and the ascent or decline of individuals and groups follow 622 each other in a rather surprising manner.

How will the chief be able to overcome these difficulties? The first instrumental force of his power lies in his generosity. Generosity —an all important feature of chieftainship among most primitive peoples, especially in America—plays an outstanding part even on those crude cultural levels where worldly goods are limited to the most primitive weapons and tools, coarse ornaments made of feathers, shells and bones, and raw materials, such as lumps of resin and wax, hanks of fiber and splinters of bamboo for arrow-making. There cannot be great economic distinctions between families each of which can pack [622] all of its belongings in the baskets carried along by the women during 556 the long travels of the dry season. But, although the chief does not seem to fare better, in this respect, than the others, he must always have at hand surpluses of food, tools, weapons, ornaments which, while being small indeed, acquire great value because of the scarcity which is the prevalent condition. When an individual, a family or the band itself needs or covets something, the chief is called upon to secure the desired article. Generosity is the quality, much speculated on, which is expected of a new chief. Generosity is the string constantly struck which makes the general consent to one's leadership sound clear or out of tune. There is little doubt that, in this respect, the chief's ability to give is exploited to the utmost. Band chiefs used to be my best informants, and, well aware of their difficult position, I liked to reward them liberally; but I seldom saw one of my many gifts remain in their hands for more than a few days. Each time I took leave of a band, after a few weeks or a few months, its members had time to become the happy hoarders of axes, knives, beads, and so on. As a rule, however, the chief was exactly as poor as at my first arrival. Everything he had received from me (and this was considerably more than the average) had already been squeezed out of him. This collective greediness not seldom drives the chief to an almost desperate position; then the refusal to give plays about the same part, in this primitive democracy, as the threat to resign followed by a vote of confidence in a modern parliament. When a chief reaches the point where he must say: "To give away is over! To be generous is over! Let another be generous in my place!", he must, indeed, be sure of his power and prestige, for his rule is undergoing its severest crisis.

Ingenuity is but the intellectual form of generosity. A great deal